



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) Allegation of Exposure to Carcinogens Naval Station (NS) Guantanamo Bay



Note: The FAQ will be updated as new information is received. Please visit again later for future updates.

UPDATED – August 20, 2015

Q. WHAT DID THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS FIND?

A. The preliminary findings of the public health review indicated that the buildings, including tents and trailers at the Office of Military Commissions (OMC) are habitable for occupancy. Preliminary findings are part of the overall process and protocol for this public health review. Anticipate completion of the final report by 31 August 15.

Q. WHAT DOES HABITABLE FOR OCCUPANCY MEAN?

A. Habitable for occupancy means that there are no imminent health hazards to personnel working in those locations which were part of the preliminary health review by the public health team.

Q. IS THERE ASBESTOS IN THE BUILDINGS?

A. Several of the buildings in the Office of Military Commissions area contain asbestos. The asbestos, however, does not present a health risk as it is being properly managed in place and there is no pathway for exposure to individuals working in those buildings.

Q. HOW MANY MEDICAL RECORDS WERE REVIEWED?

A. Only the records of the personnel in the initial complaint are being reviewed by the public health.

Q. WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

A. Next steps will be determined following a review of the preliminary findings by Navy leadership. We expect that to take place by the end of the month.

Q. WERE THE COMMISSIONS CANCELLED BECAUSE OF THE ALLEGATIONS?

A. The commissions were canceled by the military judge but for completely unrelated matters to the public health review. Any questions about the commissions should be addressed with the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Q. WHAT IS A PUBLIC HEALTH REVIEW?

A. This is a review performed by epidemiologists, human health risk assessors, occupational and environmental physicians, environmental health specialists, industrial hygienists and other and health experts who review medical and historical records, and available testing and sampling data to determine if there are any potential impacts or health risks associated with potential exposure to environmental hazards.

Q. WHY IS A PUBLIC HEALTH REVIEW BEING DONE AT NAVAL STATION GUANTANAMO BAY?

A. The Department of Defense (DOD) Inspector General referred a hotline complaint for action to Commander, Navy Installations Command on 20 July 2015. The complaint alleges that since 2004 military and civilian personnel working for the DOD Military Commissions (Commissions) at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay have been exposed to carcinogens in an area surrounding the Commissions' trailers, tents, office and courtrooms. The Navy takes concerns about the safety of our personnel seriously. In response to this inquiry, the Navy launched a Public Health Review (conducted by the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center) to determine if environmental contamination exists that poses a substantial impact to human health and safety. Additionally, the Navy is currently performing a review of installation historical records to determine if there was any disposal of fuel or other hazardous materials in the area.

Q. WHAT IS INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE?

A. Industrial hygiene is the science of anticipating, recognizing, evaluating and controlling workplace conditions that may cause workers' injury or illness. Industrial hygienists use environmental monitoring and analytical methods to detect the extent of worker exposure and employ engineering, work practice controls and other methods to control potential health hazards. Industrial hygiene surveys are conducted to accurately assess worker exposures to chemical, physical and biological agents in the workplace and provide recommendations for their reduction or elimination.

Q. WHAT IS A CARCINOGEN?

A. A carcinogen is a substance that is capable of causing cancer in humans or animals. It is important to note that carcinogens don't lead to cancer after every exposure. Some commonly known carcinogens include asbestos, radon, certain pesticides, arsenic, ultraviolet rays, chlorine and tobacco smoke. An individual's unique genetic makeup may influence the body's response to a carcinogen.

From Town Hall Meeting on August 6, 2015

Q. WILL SERVICE MEMBERS RECEIVE SOMETHING IN THEIR MEDICAL RECORDS ANNOTATING THAT THEY WERE ASSIGNED IN GUANTANAMO BAY AND COULD HAVE BEEN POTENTIALLY EXPOSED TO CARCINOGENS?

A. If they do in fact find carcinogens I am sure something will be provided in your record to document that.

Q. WHAT GROUPS ARE CONDUCTING THE PUBLIC HEALTH REVIEW?

A. The Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center is the lead in conducting the review. Assisting them are U.S. Naval Hospital Guantanamo Bay and Naval Facilities Engineering Command Guantanamo Bay.

Q. WHAT IS THE TIMELINE?

A. A solid timeline cannot be provided at this time.

Q. ARE THERE SPECIFIC TESTS THEY CAN DO TO DETECT FOR SPECIFIC CARCINOGENS?

A. At this time we have not identified there are any carcinogens but the team of experts are looking at anything and everything.

Q. IS THERE AN ANONYMOUS HOTLINE SOMEONE CAN CALL IF THEY WANT TO REPORT HEALTH ISSUES?

A. There is not an anonymous hotline. If someone wants to report any issues the team will have to take an in depth look at the persons medical records so there is no way to keep it anonymous.

Q. ARE THERE PREVIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL RECORDS OF THE OMC AREA?

A. The team from Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center is currently doing a historical records review of all available environmental data.

Q. ARE THERE PLANS TO RELOCATE THE OMC OPERATIONS TO ANOTHER LOCATION?

A. No, at this time there are no plans to move anyone. Once we receive the results of the study we will make a decision on how we will move forward.

Q. IS THERE ANY IMMEDIATE DANGER TO THOSE LIVING AND WORKING IN THAT AREA?

A. No, there is no immediate danger to those living and working in that area.

For Additional Information

Q. WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

A. The following websites provide additional information;

<http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/environmental-programs/Pages/default.aspx>

<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/clusters>

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